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ABSTRACT

Childcare centers in Canada's largest cities frequently have children with family languages other than English or French and who are of diverse racial and cultural backgrounds. This three-part study focused on cultural diversity in early childhood education (ECE) settings in Toronto (Ontario), Vancouver (British Columbia), and Montreal (Quebec). The Center Study examined teachers' and supervisors' attitudes about benefits and challenges associated with diversity. The Family Study assessed the child care experiences of parents and minority group children. The Faculty Study interviewed college faculty preparing early childhood education teachers. Among the major findings are the following: (1) early childhood teachers often felt unprepared for working with children of diverse backgrounds, with language barriers identified as their largest challenge; (2) teachers reported minimal contact with minority families more frequently than for majority families; (3) a majority of teachers reported having seen racial incidents between children and parents also reported such incidents; (4) parents but had concerns about the lack of academic activities, believed that teachers did not teach children to behave properly, and had considerable concerns about the food served; (5) some parents wanted centers to encourage the mainstream language assimilation process and others wanted more support of the family language; (6) the majority of ECE teacher preparation programs had no specific courses dealing with diversity; and (7) ECE students and faculty remain relatively homogeneous. The findings generated several recommendations for teachers and ECE teacher preparation programs. (Contains 132 references.) (KB)